

THE
SUFFICIENCY
OF THE
Scripture-Revelation,
As to the Proof of it. PART I.

A
SERMON

Preach'd at the
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. Paul,
March the 4th. 1⁶⁹²₇₀₀.

BEING
The Third, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

By OFSPRING BLACKALL, Rector
of St. Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary
to His MAJESTY.

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SERMON

Preached
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN
At the 4th
Sermon
on the 17th of June 1780
By the Rev. Mr. H. H. H. H. H.

By OFFICING OF THE CHURCH
of the 17th of June 1780
in the Cathedral Church of St. John

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ST. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

HAVING in my first Discourse on these Words endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived, and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate ; I came the last time to consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be such a Revelation ; Or whether there be not some particular *Defects* in it, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be, as I said, either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it ; And if in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give *sufficient Directions* what to do ; Or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I propounded to shew (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *suffi-*

cient Directions what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which it proposes are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires : And (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And the Two first of these I have already done. I proceed now to the Third, *viz.*

(3.) To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it ; And that I shall presume to be *sufficient Reason* in this Case, which we readily accept and allow of as *sufficient* in all other Cases of the like Nature.

And I suppose it will be granted that we have *sufficient Proof* given us of the *Truth* of the Things contained in *Holy Scripture*, and of the *Authority* of it, if it can be shewn, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of *Holy Scripture* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded. And 3. That if the *Matters* of *Fact* recorded in the *Scripture* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and divine *Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

These things therefore I shall now endeavour to make good.

But in speaking to this Point, I shall (for Brevity's sake) confine my Discourse only to the *Books* of the *New Testament* ; Partly, because *these* are the *Books* wherein our *Christian Religion* is chiefly taught ; And especially

especially because I think there are none who receive the *New Testament* as of *divine Authority*, that do (or indeed can, with any Reason) reject the *Old*.

1. Then, I am to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books of Holy Scripture*, (of the *New Testament* in particular) were *written* by those *Persons* that are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

This indeed is a Point that it does not properly lie upon us to make any Proof of; For as a Man's *Possession* of an Estate, is alone a good and a *sufficient* Title to it, till a better is shewn by the Person that endeavours to eject him: so it is here; *These Books* are generally receiv'd as *written* by such and such *Persons*; *These Authors* have the *Name*, *these* have (as it were) the *Possession* of them; and that's Title enough, if no other could be produced, so long as no Evidence is offered to shew that any other Persons have a better Title to them. It lies on them therefore who *deny* that the *Books* are *theirs*, to give a Reason of what they say; either by alledging some special Matter out of the *Books* themselves, whereby it may be proved that they could not be of *their* Writing; or by producing some credible and authentick History testifying that they were written by some other Persons, and not by them. And till they can, and shall do this (which I am persuaded can never be done) we may very well refuse to produce any positive Evidence to affirm or prove their Title, their *Possession* being a good Title enough, till a better appears. And a Tenant might with as good Reason refuse to pay Rent to the Person, of whom he took the Estate, and to whom he hath ever hitherto paid Rent, and whose Right to it is not at all controverted, until he shall suffer his Writings to be perused
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and examined, and by them make it plainly appear that he is the *lawful* Landlord; as any Man can now refuse to give that Credit to *these Books*, as written by the *Apostles*, which has been given hitherto, and is still given by all Christians, unless he may have now as good positive Evidence of their being written by the *Apostles*, as might have been given thereof at first, and as, it may be presumed, was given before their Title to them was so universally acknowledged.

But nevertheless what a Man is not under any Obligation to do for the asserting of his Right, he may do wisely enough for his own Satisfaction. And it must needs be a Satisfaction and Pleasure to a Man, altho' his Title to his Estate be not at present controverted, if in looking over the Writings and Evidences of it, he sees plainly how it descended to him by a lineal Succession from Father to Son for many Generations past; and how it came at first to his Ancestors, by a clear and fair Purchase from the former Possessors; or by Donation from the Prince, in the Division of a vast or conquered Country; and if he also finds ancient Terriers agreeing in the same Measure, and Boundings, and exactly describing the same Estate which he now possesses; and if moreover, looking far back, he sees, that upon some Disputes or Law-suits that have formerly been concerning it, Judgment has been always given on his Side. It cannot but please him, I say, that upon such a Search into Antiquity, he finds that he is so very well provided to make out his Title, if there should ever be any Occasion for it; altho' by Reason of the long and quiet *Possession*, that he, and his Ancestors before him, time out of Mind, have had of it,

it, he has no just Cause to fear he shall ever meet with any Disturbance.

And so it is here: These Writings, *the Books* of the *New Testament*, are generally *acknowledged* to be written by the *Apostles* of *Christ*, and their Authority is at present uncontested; It may therefore reasonably be presumed, (especially by those who have not Parts or Learning or Leisure to examine into the Reasons of such things,) that they would not have been so universally acknowledged and revered as they are upon this Account, but upon very good Grounds; tho' what the Grounds thereof are, they have not yet inquired; Their being in *Possession* is alone Reason enough to acknowledge and assert their Title. It lies upon them that *deny* these *Books* to be *theirs*, to produce satisfactory Evidence of their being forged or counterfeit; and till they shall produce some Evidence thereof that has a Shew and Appearance of Truth, we have no Reason to be staggered in our Belief by their bare, however bold and confident, Denial of their Authority; And much less shall we need to give our Reasons for our receiving them as written by the *Apostles*, till our Adversaries shall offer some Reasons why we ought not to receive them as such.

But nevertheless, because we see there are some, in this incredulous Age, that shew a good Will to deny the Authority of these *Sacred Books*; and whose Interest it would be to prove them *Spurious*; and because we cannot tell what unwarrantable Practices their Inclination and Interest may put them upon; nor what Writings or Evidences, plausibly forged and counterfeited, they may hereafter produce: it
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cannot be amiss for us to inquire and see ; and it cannot but be a Pleasure and Satisfaction to us (who hold our Hope of eternal Life chiefly by these Writings) to find and consider how well provided we are to detect and disprove any such Forgeries, if they should be offered, by being able to produce, in Opposition thereto, as good positive Proof that these *Books* are *genuine*, as such a Matter is capable of, much better than I believe can be produced for the Authority of any other Books of the like Antiquity.

And it gives us some Satisfaction in the Belief we have been bred up in, that these are the *genuine Books* of the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, to find that they are receiv'd as such, not by a small Party of Men, not by that Church and Nation only to which we belong, but by *all Christians* dispersed in *all Parts* of the World ; and likewise that they *all* agree with us in the same Testimony, *viz.* that they received them, as such, from their Fathers. For that these Books should be thus generally receiv'd and acknowledged, by so many different and far distant Nations, without some good Grounds, is not conceivable ; because it can neither be imagined that the *Christians* of the present Age, dispersed in all Countries should combine together to say that they receiv'd these *Books* from their Fathers, as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*, if they had not so receiv'd them ; nor that their Forefathers, in any of the Ages past, should have all agreed together, to put a Cheat upon their Posterity, by delivering down to them these *Books* as written by the *Apostles*, when they themselves had no good Reason to believe them so, or when they knew the contrary.

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It is a further Satisfaction to us, to observe and consider, that the *Authority* of these *Books* is as well proved as it can be, not only by oral, but also by the best *written* Tradition; The Christian Writers of all Ages, citing them (as they had Occasion) as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*; And that, as well before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was defined and declared by *Councils*, as since.

And lastly, It gives us very good Satisfaction that these *Books* are the *genuine Writings* of the *Persons* to whom they are ascribed, that we do not find they were ever excepted against, as *spurious* and *counterfeit*, in *those times* when it would have been most proper to have made the Exception; and by *those Persons* whose Cause and Interest it would have served very much to have proved them Spurious, if it could have been done.

For the proper *time* to have made this Exception to these Writings, was *when*, or *soon after*, they were first published; when it would have been easie to have proved them Spurious if they had been so; and no less easie to have brought positive Evidence of their being Genuine, if indeed they were Genuine; either by the living Testimony of the Authors themselves, or of others that knew their Writing; or by producing the original Copies under their own Hands; And therefore their being *then* received as the Writings of the *Apostles*, by those who were best able to know whose Writings they were; and their being not (for ought appears) excepted against, upon this Account, at *that time*, is a very good Argument that there was no just Ground for any such Exception.

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And the most *likely Persons*, they whose Cause and Interest it would have served most, to deny that these *Books* were written by the reputed *Authors* thereof, were the Enemies of our Religion, The *Jews*, or the *Heathens*; who neither of them wanted either Malice or Wit, to alledge any Fact that they could have justified the Truth of, in Disproof of the Christian Religion. It is therefore no small Satisfaction to us to observe, that *they* never argued against the Christian Religion from this Topic; that *they* never denied that the *Books* which the *Christians* received as written by the *Apostles* were *genuine*; Nay, that *Julian* himself, one of the subtillest, as well as of the bitterest Adversaries of the Christian Faith, did yet expressly own that the *Books* read by the *Christians*, as the Books of *Peter*, *Paul*, *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, were indeed theirs.

After all indeed it must be owned that we have not such Demonstration that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *Apostles*, as is self-evident, and cannot possibly be contradicted; for the Matter it self is not capable of such Demonstration. But we have such Demonstration of it as cannot be contradicted with any Reason; We have as good Assurance of it as we have, or can have, of any Matter of that kind; We have as good Evidence of the Truth of it, as, supposing it to be true, we could have of it; and more than this cannot be desired. We are as *morally certain* that *these Books* were written by the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, as we are that any other ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; There being no Argument, by which it is,
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or can be proved, that any ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it, which does not prove the Authority of *these Books*, rather more strongly, than it does the Authority of any other Book; And there being no Argument, that is, or can be urged, against the Authority of *these Books*, which may not, with as good Reason, be urged, to disprove the Authority of any other Book of the like Antiquity; nay indeed, of all the Books in the World, ancient or modern, the Authors of which are not now living, or of whose Writing the Books ascribed to them no living Evidence can be produced.

For what is there that can be said to disprove, or to render suspected the Authority of *these Books*, but only that there is a Possibility that Things may not be as we believe them to be? It *may be*, (the *Atheist*, or *Infidel* will say) that *these Books* were not written by the Persons under whose Names we receive them, but by some others; It *may be*, (he'll say, for Instance :) that there never was such a Man as *Matthew the Publican*, afterwards an *Apostle* of *Christ*; Or if there was, yet, it *may be*, that the *Gospel* that goes under his Name was not of *his* Writing, but is a Book of a much later Date; It *may be*, that it was written by some crafty Priest, no longer ago than the last Age; And that he and some others in Confederacy with him at the same Time that they forged this *Gospel* in the *Greek Tongue*, did likewise make and contrive all those *Translations* of it into several Languages that are now extant, some of which pretend to very great Antiquity, and which are all made with such an Appearance

pearance of Truth, and with such Congruity to the several Times in which they are said to be made, that none of the Learned Men of the present Age have been able to discover the Fraud; And, *It may be* also, that when they forged the *Gospel* it self, they forged likewise all the *other Books*, that are pretended to be written by several Historians and Divines, in divers Languages, and in several Ages of the World for Sixteen Hundred Years past, in which this *Gospel* is either testified to be written by *St. Matthew*, or is cited or commented upon as *his*; And *it may be* likewise that at the same Time, that they trumped up all these Books in one Countrey, they had their Confederates and Correspondents that did the same in all the other Countries where they are now found; not only exposing them to *publick Sale* as Books of ancient Date and venerable Antiquity, but likewise slyly conveying an infinite Number of written and printed Copies of the same into all *Libraries*, both publick and private, unknown to the Keepers and Owners thereof; And *it may be* that all these things were done so *secretly*, that none of the Confederacy did ever confess, nor any besides ever discover the Cheat; And *it may be* that all the rest of the World was so much *asleep* at that time, as to have no Suspicion of what was done, nor any Sense of that great Alteration that had been made in the World by these Books; nor any Remembrance, afterwards, when they awoke and found themselves *Christians*, that they had been of some other Religion before, when they were first taken with that *Lethargick Fit*.

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But if these things *may be*, what is there of this kind that *may not be*? If the World be so much mistaken in this Matter, it may be as much mistaken in any other Matter of the like Nature. And then, It *may be*, that there never was such a Man as *Homer*, or *Virgil*, or *Cæsar*, or *Cicero*, or *Plutarch*, or any other of those Persons, as whose Writings we now receive the Books that go under their Names; but that all the Books pretended to be written by those Authors, and likewise all the Books of later Date, whereby the Authority of those former Books is attested, were in like Manner contrived, and made and dispersed, by such another Gang of crafty and designing Knaves who took a Pleasure in abusing the rest of the World, or hoped to make a Gain to themselves thereby.

Nay then (for why should we stop here?) It *may be*, that not only the *Laws* of our *Religion*, but the *Laws* of our *Civil State* too, are all *forged* and *counterfeit*; It *may be*, that once upon a time, The *Keeper* of the *Publick Records*, having by much and long Observation attained to good Skill in the ancient Ways of Writing for many Ages backward, and being a compleat Master of his Pen, and having also gotten an Art to make a fresh Writing seem just as old as he had a Mind it should be thought to be, did compose, and deposite in their proper Places, those *Original Acts* of *Parliament* which are now taken to be the *Laws* of some of our former *Kings*; and that to confirm and establish his Fraud, he procured some other Persons at the same Time to Write or Print, and to convey into

into all *Shops* and *Libraries*, several *Books* of *Reports* and *Pleadings*, wherein these counterfeit *Acts* were cited and referred to; and it *may be* that while as this was doing, none else had their *Eyes* open to see it, nor had ever after the least *Suspicion* of what was done; Or if they had, yet that they were so well pleased with the *Cheat*, (which they thought would be a good *Means* of preserving *Peace* and *Justice* in the *Nation*) as to be willing it should pass to *Posterity* undiscovered. These *May be's* are I am sure every whit as possible and as likely as the other.

Either therefore let those *Men* who upon this *Account* doubt of the *Authority* of the *Books* of the *New Testament*; Or who would make others doubt of it, only by suggesting that it is a thing possible in *Nature*, that they *may be* all forged and counterfeit, (let them, I say, either) entertain and suggest the same *Doubt* concerning all other ancient *Books*, of the *Antiquity* and *Authority* of which there is not greater *Evidence* than there is of these; And then they will render themselves so justly ridiculous to the *World* that there will be no *Need* to expose their *Folly*; for then they must call in *Question* the *Authority* of all *Books* and the *Truth* of all *History*: Or else let them fairly own that the true *Reason* of their making a *Doubt* concerning these *Books* rather than concerning others, is because they do not relish the *Matter* of them; because they find it easier to resist that *Strong Evidence* that is given of the *Authority* of these *Books* than they do to govern their *Lives* according to those strict *Rules* of *Holiness* and *Purity* that are therein prescribed,

scribed, and to bring their Wills to the *Obedience of Faith*. And if they will but own this, (which I believe is the Truth) their Prejudice and Partiality will be so evident to all, that it may be reasonably hoped their impious Suggestions will do but little Harm in the World; and that few Men of any Sense or Reason will be so fool-hardy as to venture their Souls and run the Hazard of a miserable Eternity, upon so many, and such very improbable (I had almost said, such impossible) *may be's* as must be supposed to have been, if indeed these Books are forged and counterfeit, if indeed they were not written by those Persons whom they are commonly ascribed to.

But yielding this Point (may the *Atheist* or *Infidel* farther say) *viz.* that the Gospel called *St. Matthew's* was written by *St. Matthew*, and that of *St. Mark* by *St. Mark*, and the *Rest* of the Books which are ascribed to any other certain Authors, by those Persons to whom they are severally ascribed; yet the Authority of the whole *New Testament* will not, by this Concession, be sufficiently established. For of *some* Books of the *New Testament* the Authors are *not known*, of *others* they are *doubted*; *Some Parts* of this Book that are now received have been *rejected* in ancient Times, and *others* not *universally* receiv'd. And besides, 'tis certain that in the early Times of Christianity there were several *Counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, some of which may possibly have slipped into the Canon unawares. And lastly, If it be granted that *all* the Books of the *New Testament* were *originally* written by the *Apostles* or other Inspired Men, yet however the

the Books that we now have are but *Copies*, in which many *Alterations* may have been made by *designing Men*, or *careless Transcribers*.

These Objections (or Cavils rather, for such I am sure they would be accounted in any other Case) against the Authority of these Sacred Books have been urged by some Men both anciently and lately; But they have been also so well and fully answered by those learned Persons that have written in Defence of the *Canon*, that I once thought to have taken no Notice of them, and I believe had not done it, but that I considered on the other Hand, that when an old Objection that has been answered an Hundred times is urged afresh, a great many may take it for a new one, and if it be not quickly answered, may be apt to think it unanswerable; so that in this Case it may be better to repeat the same Answer (if it be a good one) that has been often formerly made to it, than to say nothing. And besides, in this degenerate Age, in which any wild or Atheistical Discourse passes for Wit, it may be the Hap of some Persons, who have not much Mind or Leisure or Opportunity to read Books, to hear these things in Conversation, and not knowing readily what Answers to make to them, to be somewhat staggered in their Belief thereby; Especially if they be such whose loose and licentious Way of Living makes them easie to receive, without Examination any Notions that may give them Ease or Encouragement in Sin.

For these Reasons therefore I thought it would not be amiss, (especially because it is a Matter properly

perly belonging to the Subject I am now upon, and because I have some time left for it) to mention, as briefly as may be, the Answers that have been usually given to these Objections.

And, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that of *some* of the Books of the *New Testament* the Authors *Names* are *not* certainly *known* (as namely of the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*) and that of others, the *Authors* have been doubted, (particularly, of the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*.) To this it hath been answered,

1. That the Credit and Authority of a Book depends many times much more upon the good Assurance that we have of the *time* when it was written, and of the *Character* of the Person that wrote it, than upon the certain Knowledge of his *Name*. It is therefore a Matter of no great Consequence whether the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* was written by *St. Paul* himself (as is commonly, and upon very probable Grounds, believed;) Or (as some have conjectured) by *St. Luke* his constant Companion; Or (as others) by *St. Clemens* his *Fellow-labourer* Phil. 4. 3. *whose Name was in the Book of Life*; Or (as others) by *St. Barnabas* his Assistant in Preaching the Gospel, and who is dignified by *St. Luke* with the Title of an *Apostle*. And so, neither is it very material whether the *Epistles* called the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*, and commonly believed to be written by the same Person that wrote the first, were indeed written by *St. John* the *Apostle* and *Evangelist*, or (as some have thought) by another *John*, who was made *Bishop* of the *Jewish Christians* at *Ephesus*, by him; For it is sufficient that the

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Writers of these Books, (which soever they were of the Persons before-mentioned) were of good Ability and Integrity, and well instructed in that Doctrine and Religion which they wrote about; And of this, besides the Testimony of the Ancients, there is good Evidence enough in the Writings themselves.

2. In Answer to this, and to all other Objections of this sort, against these, or any other Books, or Chapters, or Paragraphs of the New Testament, it hath been farther truly said, that there is nothing *singular* in these Books, that there is no Doctrine of Christianity taught in any Part of the New Testament of the Author or Authority of which there hath ever been any Doubt in the Church, which is not taught in some other undoubted and uncontroverted Part of the same Book. So that if it were granted that those Parts of the New Testament, of which there has been formerly any Doubt were still of uncertain Authority, our Christianity would suffer no real Loss thereby; Only giving up these controverted Places we should sometimes want a good Help to enable us to understand readily those other uncontroverted Places of the New Testament, wherein the same Doctrines are (but perhaps more briefly or obscurely) delivered.

2. Whereas 'tis said that *some* Parts of the *New Testament* have been *rejected* in ancient Times; This is granted. But then it hath been shewn, that, considering by *whom* they have been rejected, and under what *Notion* and for what *Reasons* they were rejected, this Objection is of no force to invalidate the Authority even of those *Parts* of the *New Testament* which have been so rejected, and much less

less of the rest of the Book which has been allowed by all.

Thus, some *Portions* of the *New Testament* have been rejected by *Hereticks*, because they contradicted their private and singular Notions; Some by *Judaizing Christians*, as the Two first Chapters of *St. Matthew*, because they were not found in that *Hebrew Copy* of that Gospel which they used; and all the *Epistles* of *St. Paul* were likewise rejected by the same Persons; but not, as not written by *St. Paul*, but only because they were written by *him*, whom they looked upon as an Enemy to their Nation, because he levelled them with other Nations, and as too averse to that Religion which had been introduced by *Moses*, which they continued so wedded to, even after their embracing Christianity, that they could not but suspect him to be a *false Apostle* who had so plainly taught the Abrogation thereof. And for the like Reasons *some other Parts* of the *New Testament* have been likewise rejected by some few Men; that is, not because they wanted the same Attestation which the other Parts of it had, or because it appeared by credible History that they were *Spurious*, but only because they contradicted too plainly some Notions which their former Prejudices or Education had made them fond of. So that this Argument against the Authority of the *New Testament*, taken from the *Rejection* of some *Parts* of it, by some particular *Men* or *Sects*, is manifestly of no Strength, unless there was some *good Reason* for their Rejecting them; And that there was *good Reason* for it, has not yet been shewn, but the contrary has been shewn very plainly by the ancient Writers

of the Church, in several Books, (written by them in Confutation of those Sects and Heresies) which are still extant.

And 3. Whereas it is further said, that *some Books* which are now receiv'd as *Parts* of the *New Testament*, were not *universally* receiv'd in the most early Times, when their Authority (if they were authentic) might have been asserted upon more certain Grounds than it can be now; *viz.* the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of *St. James*, the *2d.* of *St. Peter*, the *2d.* and *3d.* of *St. John*, the *Epistle* of *St. Jude*, and the *Book* of the *Revelation*: This is likewise granted. But in Answer to it, it is said;

1. That there is good Evidence from Antiquity, that these *controverted Books*, were receiv'd in the most early Times, by those who had the best Opportunity of satisfying themselves of the Authors and Authority thereof, *viz.* by those to whom they were sent, and in general by the whole *Greek Church*.

2. That it is no Wonder, that *these Books* (being written either to Christians dispersed, and consequently only published by giving out Copies thereof to some, to be communicated, as there was Opportunity, to others; or else to private Persons, living perhaps at great Distance from the Places from which they were sent) were not so easie to be attested, and upon that Account were not at first so generally receiv'd, as the others were, which were either written to particular Churches, to which the Authors Hands, and the Messengers that brought them were well known, or which were first published and receiv'd in the same Places where they were written. And,

3. That

3. That even *those Churches* which did for some time *doubt* of the Authority of *these Books*, were persuaded at last to receive them as the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles*, or other Inspired Men. If therefore it be supposed, that while they doubted of these Books, they had *Reason* for their Doubt; that is, that they did it, because they were not as yet fully satisfied that they were *Apostolical Writings*, (which the Objectors, I believe, will readily enough grant) it may be very reasonably presumed, that they had afterwards *greater Reason* to lay aside their Doubt; and that when they did receive them, it was, because there had been then lately such Evidence and Attestation given of their being written by the *Apostles* or other Inspired Men as they had not heard of before, such as they could not then, with any Reason, contradict or gainsay; For ordinarily a less Reason will persuade a Man to take up an Opinion at first, than will persuade him to go back from an Opinion (how weakly soever grounded) which he has before embraced and defended. So that this Objection is so far from lessening, that it rather strengthens the Proof we have of the Authority even of these once *controverted Books*; And it is, besides, a very good corroborating Evidence of the Authority of *all the other Books* of the *New Testament*. For the Backwardness of some Churches to receive these *controverted Books* at first, (when they had nothing to object to the Matter of them) makes it evident, that the Christians of the first Ages were not so very easie and credulous as some have represented them; that they did not so very greedily swallow any Book for divine Revelation that contained a great many Miracles, mixed with a few good
Morals,

Morals, without making due Enquiry concerning the Author and Authority thereof. But on the contrary, their being so hard to be persuaded to receive these controverted Books for some time, while they wanted, as they thought, sufficient Attestation, (altho' the Doctrine of them was in all Points agreeable to the Doctrine of the other Books which they had before received; their being so hard, I say, to receive these Books) of the Authority of which there nevertheless really was such Evidence, as they themselves, after having well weighed and considered it, declared themselves satisfied with, gives very good Ground to believe, that they had from the Beginning, such Evidence as was without Exception of the Authority of *all those other Books* (that is, of much the greatest Part) of the *New Testament*, which were never controverted, which were from the first, and with universal Consent receiv'd by all Christian Churches; For if there had not been very undeniable Evidence of *their* being the *genuine* Writings of the *Apostles*, or other inspired Men, there would certainly have been the same Doubt and Controversie concerning them, that there once was concerning these.

But, 4. It hath been further objected, that in the early Times of Christianity, there were several *counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, which passed among some for the *Writings* of the *Apostles*; and that 'tis possible some of them may have slipped into the *Canon*, unawares to the *first Christians*, who, by all the Accounts of those Times, were more remarkable for their *Honesty* and *Simplicity* and *Zeal*, than for their extraordinary *Parts* and *Learning*.

But

But this Objection, (granting the Matter of Fact alledg'd in it to be true) is so far from *lessening*, that it rather *adds* to that *reasonable Assurance* that we have, that *all* the *Books* of the *Canon* are true and *genuine*. For there is nothing so apt to put Men upon using *Caution*, as a great Probability of being cheated if they be not cautious. Thus, when the Coin is generally good, and there is very little base or counterfeit Money stirring, Men commonly take it by *Tale*, without examining the *Weight* and *Purity* of every *Piece*; and so may more easily have a single Piece of lighter Weight or baser Metal put upon them without discerning it: But if the *Coin* be much corrupted, they look more *narrowly* upon every *single Piece* of Money that they take, and if there be the least Cause to suspect it, make Trial of it by the *Scale* or *Touchstone*, before they accept it as good. If therefore there were in the early Times of Christianity, many *counterfeit Pieces* given out, and perhaps receiv'd by some, as written by the *Apostles*, and which were, some of them, *discovered* to be *spurious*; (and there is not greater Evidence from Antiquity, that there were any such *spurious Writings*, than there is that the *Spuriousness* of some of them was soon *discern'd*;) this could not but put the Christians of those Times upon examining more strictly, what Evidence and Attestation there was that those other Books were true and genuine which had been generally receiv'd as such. So that the *more* there were of these *spurious* and *counterfeit Books*, so much the *more* assured and confident we may reasonably be, that none but such as were *undoubtedly true* and *authentick* and very *well attested*, were admitted into the *Canon*; And, of the

the two, it is much more probable, that they did, for Want of *clear Attestation*, refuse to admit some that had been written by the *Apostles*, than that they did, without *sufficient Attestation*, admit any that were not.

And that the Christians of those early Times (who had the best Means and Opportunities of satisfying themselves whether any Book, given out as written by an *Apostle*, was so or not) wanted not Skill to *discern* between a *true* and a *spurious* Writing; (as is maliciously suggested by some Men) is abundantly evident, from those *Monuments* of the excellent Parts and Learning of *some* of the first Converts to Christianity, which are still extant in their Books; and from the Testimony that is therein given to the like good Ability of several others, who were famous in their Generation, for their Preaching and Writings, and for their stoutly maintaining the Truths of Christianity both against *Infidels* and *Hereticks*, but whose Books are now unhappily lost.

But 5. and lastly; It was further said; That tho' it be granted that *all* the *Books* of the *New Testament* that are now receiv'd, were *originally* written by the *Apostles* or other inspired Men, yet those which we now have are but *Copies*; in which, by so many *Transcriptions* thereof as must have been in about 1400 Years, many *Alterations* may have happened, thro' the *Ignorance*, or *Oversight*, or *evil Design* of the *Transcribers*; And that several *Changes* have been made, is undeniably plain, by the *various Readings* that have been observed in comparing the best *Manuscript* Copies, that are now, or have been extant since Printing began; So that we cannot be sure whether any particular

ticular *Passages* once found in *those Books*, are the very *Words* of an *Apostle*, or of some ignorant or careless *Scribe*. But to this it hath been answered ;

1. That so far as this Objection is of any Force, it invalidates the Credit of all History, and of all other Books of ancient Date, as well as of the *New Testament*; Nay, indeed of all other Books, much more than of this; for the *faithfully Transcribing* whereof, it may reasonably be presumed, there was formerly, greater Care taken, (as there is now for the *correctly Printing* it) than there ordinarily was of other Books, that were of less Consequence.

2. That tho' it be certain that some *Hereticks* have attempted to corrupt the Text of the *New Testament* in some Places, and have made Changes in some *few Copies* thereof; it is almost as certain that their Attempts of this kind neither have nor ever could amount to a Corruption of all the Copies thereof that were generally in Mens Hands; In which there is even to this Day an admirable *Agreement* in all Matters of Moment. And from that general Agreement that always was in *all* the Copies of this Book, (except those *few* that were sometimes corrupted by *Hereticks*, to serve a Turn) their Attempts of this kind have been always rendred successless; and those false Doctrines, that were justified only by their own false Copies of this Book, solidly confuted.

3. It is further answered, that not only there is no Evidence that there has been, but that 'tis morally impossible that there should be a *general Depravation* of the *Copies* of *this Book*, either designedly, or by Chance, in any Place of great Consequence either in Point of History or Doctrine. For when was it

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possible

possible that this Corruption should be? Was it in the Copies that were given out, in the Days of the *Apostles*, and while they were living? This can't well be supposed; Or if it had been done then, it can't be thought but that the *Authors* of these Books, being *living*, would have taken Care to have had such false Copies of their Books suppressed, or well corrected; or at least have given publick Notice, in order to their Correction, of those Faults that had been committed in the transcribing, which did either obscure or spoil their sense.

Was it then in the Times immediately *after* the *Apostles* were *dead*? But neither could this be; for by this time an infinite Number of true Copies had been made and dispersed in all Parts of the Christian Church; And besides the *Autographs* of the Books themselves were then probably, all in being; For *Tertullian* who lived in the Third Century, witnesses that some of them were extant and to be seen even in his Time; So that by comparing of the *new false Copies* with the *ancient true ones*, or with the *Originals* themselves then extant, the Fraud would have been quickly discovered, or the Mistake easily rectified.

Was it then in the Times after this, when the *Originals* were *lost* or *worn out*? This was still less possible; For by this Time not only a greater Number of true Copies thereof, in the *Original Greek*, were *dispersed* and in the Hands of all Christians; but several *Translations* thereof had been likewise made into other Languages, several *Commentaries* had been written thereupon, and the most *material Passages* thereof had been, occasionally, *cited* by the Christian Writers of those or the foregoing Times.

And

And the further we go on downwards, 'twas still (for such Reasons as have been given already) more impossible that the Copies of this Book should be *generally corrupted* in any Place or Matter of *Moment*; as well as more likely that there should be every Day an Increase of such *small* and *literal Mistakes*, as could hardly be avoided by the greatest Care and Faithfulness. And these are the *Various Readings* before spoken of; Concerning which, and in Answer to the before-mentioned Objection, so far as it is grounded upon them, it is farther said—

4. In the fourth Place; That *they* are no other than such as are to be met with in Comparing the Manuscripts of all other Books; That these *various Readings* (if they be compared together with Judgment) are more like to lead us to understand the true Meaning of the Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense; it being very probable that when there are *several Readings*, one of them is the right, and easier by their Help, to rectifie the Mistakes that may have been made in some Copies, than it would have been, if all Copies had agreed in the same Mistake. And lastly, that it is, hardly in any Place of which there are such *various Readings*, very *material* which is the true Reading; there being no Point that is of the *Substance* either of the History or Doctrine of Christianity, that is grounded upon *any Text*, of which there are, in different Copies, *various Readings*, but which may be proved by some *other Texts*, in the Reading whereof all Copies do agree.

5. And Lastly, In Answer to this Objection, that the *Text* of the *New Testament* is depraved and *corrupted*, and consequently of uncertain Authority, it is further

said; That supposing these Books to be written by the *Apostles*, and by *divine Direction* and *Inspiration*; (which must be supposed, or at least, for Argument sake, be allow'd by those that make this Objection; Or else the Objection is trifling) it is by no Means credible that the same *Goodness* of *God* which took Care for the Writing, has not likewise taken Care for the *preserving* of these Books, so *free* (at least) from *Corruption*, that they may be *sufficient* to answer the Ends for which they were written; that is, fully to instruct Men in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice, to make them *wise unto Salvation*, and *thoroughly to furnish* them *unto all good Works*.

And now from all that hath been said I hope it appears, that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* whose *Names* they bear, or to whom they are ascribed, *viz.* by the *Apostles* of *Christ*, or other inspired Men; Which was the first thing I was to make good.

Whether there be *sufficient Reason* to give them Credit in the *Matters of Fact* which they have related; and whether the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* be well proved by the *History* of it, shall (God willing) be hereafter enquired.

In the mean Time (supposing their Testimony to be credible) what has been said upon this first Head may serve to shew, in some Measure, the Unreasonableness of those Men, who are not satisfied with the *Scripture Revelation*.

For I believe there are few that have heard any thing of the *Manner* of the first Preaching of the *Gospel*, but who think, that they that lived in those Times, and heard the *Apostles themselves*, had *sufficient Reason* to receive

receive their Testimony; And this (perhaps they'll say) is what they could wish for themselves; *viz.* That they might have heard the *Apostles themselves*; or that they might now have as good and sure Grounds of Faith as those had who were converted to Christianity by the Preaching of the *Apostles*; which if they had, they make no Doubt but they should be, *not only almost, but altogether such*, as the *Primitive Christians* were, both in Belief and Practice.

But if they are not *such* now, 'tis much to be doubted whether they would have been *such*, if they had lived then. For by what has been now said it appears, that the *Books* of the *New Testament*, being (as we have very good Reason to believe they were) written by the *Apostles* themselves, are *their Words*; *their Sermons*; that therein the *Apostles* themselves *being dead, do yet truly speak* to us, the very same things, tho' not just in the same Manner, that they spake before while they were living; and that their *Testimony written*, if indeed it be *theirs*, (which I have shewn there is no Cause to doubt of) is as credible as their *living Testimony* was.

For in Matters of common *Testimony* we make little Difference between *Speech* and *Writing*; If a Man whom we dare trust sends us a *Letter*, and therein relates such and such things, as heard or seen by himself, or as well attested to him by unexceptionable Witnesses, we give as full Credit to his *Letter* as we should do to his *Words*.

So that in Truth, our Case, who live now, is not very different from theirs who lived in the *Apostles Days*, and heard them *saying* those same Things, which we now *read* in their *Books*; and if we think those inexcuseable who did not receive their Testimony when
given

given by *Word of Mouth*, we can't in good Reason, hold our selves excused, if we receive not the same Testimony of the same Persons given *under their Hands*.

In one Respect indeed, it must be granted, that *they* had the Advantage of *us* ; viz. because they might be *surer* that they heard an *Apostle speak*, than the Nature of the Thing will admit *we* should be, that we *read* the *Words* of an *Apostle*, *written* ; But we are sure enough of this ; We have as good *moral Certainty* of it, as we can have of any thing, that is not capable of any other than a *moral Certainty* : And if the *Words* that we *read* in the *New Testament* are the *Words* of the *Apostles* of *Christ*, we have, in some Respects, the Advantage of *those* who lived in those early Times ; for we have the concurrent Testimony of *several* of the *Apostles*, *written* ; whereas hardly any in those times, (when a few Persons were to bear Witness to all the World) could have more than the Testimony of one *single Apostle* only, by *Word of Mouth* ; and many Witnesses are more credible than *one* ; And besides, there being *several* Witnesses, their Testimony if it be false, may be more easily proved so, by their *Disagreement* with one another, than the Testimony of one single Witness could be ; And lastly, a Writing, which we may *review*, and *read over* as often as we will, and which we may take what time we please to consider of, may be more thoroughly understood, and better digested, than a Sermon or Discourse only *once spoken* can well be.

But if it be granted that the *Faith* of the first Converts to Christianity, which came by *Hearing* of the *Apostles*, might be built upon more *certain* and *infallible*

lible Grounds, than ours, that comes only by *Reading*, is; (And some Reasons may perhaps be given hereafter, why 'twas fit it should be so) it is enough, however, to render our Infidelity inexcusable, if the *Grounds of Faith* that we now have, are very *rational*, if they are a *sufficient* Support for such a *Faith* as will enable us to *please God*, and to *overcome the World*.

And this may be farther said for our Comfort, and to make us easie and satisfied with those Grounds and Reasons of Faith which are afforded to us by the *written* Testimony of the *Apostles* in the *Books* of the *New Testament*; that as there is *more Certainty* in that *Belief*; (if it may be called *Belief*) which is *grounded* upon *Demonstration*, or *infallible Evidence*; so there is *more Praise* and *Vertue* in that *good Disposition* of Mind, which makes us rest satisfied with *such Grounds of Faith*, as tho' not absolutely and infallibly certain, yet cannot, with any good Reason, be *denied* or *excepted against*; According to that Saying of our Saviour to *St. Thomas*, in a like Case, with which I shall conclude; *Joh. 20. 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they, (that is, they are more blessed, their Faith is more excellent and praise-worthy, and so will intitle them to a greater Reward) who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Which Blessedness, that we may all attain, God of his great Mercy and Goodness grant, for the sake of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, &c.

FINIS.

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A Sermon Preach'd before the Honourable the House of Commons at *St. Margaret's Westminster*, January the 30th. 169¹.

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